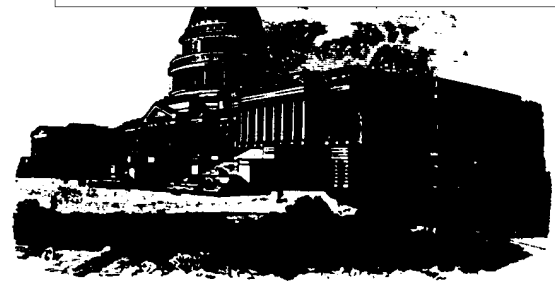


# CIA's Retirement Policy



*Editor's note: On April 25 of this year, Robert W. Magee, CIA's personnel director and CIRA's February luncheon speaker, testified before the Post Office and Civil Service Committee of the House of Representatives on the Agency's retirement system. This is a transcript of the testimony. Some passages whose substance was covered in the CIRA luncheon address have been deleted, and the rest very slightly edited. We believe that the text will be a handy reference, especially for those who wish to talk to young people about a career in intelligence.*

*The bottom line, you will note, is the emphasis on early retirement provisions. We are pleased, by the way, to find that the Agency sees its low attrition rate as a positive element rather than something to apologize for.*

Recognizing that CIA's job is different from the rest of the government, Congress historically has supported Agency efforts to recruit and retain career-oriented employees dedicated to the mission of this Agency and responsive to the demands security must impose on their professional and personal lives. Such a career service now exists. Attrition rates, among the lowest in the government, attest to a healthy career organization. The creation of this work force did not happen overnight or by accident. It exists because successive Congresses and Administrations were sensitive to the needs of people who spend their professional lives in intelligence.

In recognition of the unique mission of the Central Intelligence Agency, Congress has provided the Director of Central Intelligence with special authorities with respect to personnel. These authorities have no counterpart in the federal government. Consequently, CIA employees are statutorily excluded from tenure and from the protection and benefits derived by status under Civil Service laws, rules and regulations. This is as it must be since the Director must have full and final authority to say when and where an employee will serve, at what duties, and for how long.

To understand the role played by retirement in the CIA personnel system, it is first necessary to have an appreciation of the process which recruits and retains a CIA employee, a process which in some ways is similar to other organizations but which in the aggregate is unique. CIA has the most rigorous pre-employment screening process in the United States. Nowhere else is each applicant subject to such scrutiny.

A typical applicant first takes an eight-hour Agency-unique exam developed by the Office of Strategic Services in World War II and modified through the years by some of the best minds in the fields of education and psychology. This test provides insights into an applicant's intellectual capability, temperament, work attitudes, vocational interest, writing ability and psychological profile. Those who do well on the test, who have demonstrated high achievement either in their academic or professional

careers, and who have favorable personal interviews are placed into the medical/security clearance procedure.

Employment by the Central Intelligence Agency carries with it extraordinary health risks. These risks are inherent both in geographic and socio-political environments to which employees are liable for assignment. The stresses involved in highly classified work and overseas environments require us to have an extraordinarily detailed clinical and psychiatric screening for all applicants. We require not only that applicants themselves pass this medical exam, but for those in the overseas career track, dependents must be similarly cleared.

Our security/suitability screening is the most detailed in the United States government. Every employee, from the most senior to most junior, is investigated by our own security officers in a process that covers the last 15 years of an applicant's life. Again, dependent factors can be disqualifying for the applicant. When all of the data are accumulated, we have a very thorough understanding of the applicant's entire life style. These data are validated during a polygraph interview given all applicants.

At the end of a three-year trial period, the medical/security process is repeated. It is gratifying to note that 99% of our employees successfully complete this trial period.

It is perhaps not surprising that we must consider large numbers of applicants to find the precious few who meet these demanding standards. Despite enormous difficulties, we have attracted analysts, attorneys, doctors, case officers, engineers and scientists of the highest caliber. Meeting our recruitment requirements, however, remains one of our principal priorities. It is a never-ending struggle which can only get more difficult as we compete in the marketplace with major U.S. industries for the best and the brightest.

Entering on duty, the CIA employee becomes part of a world which is generally isolated, nomadic, idealistic, secretive and increasingly dangerous. In addition to those personal constraints common to the few in government who hold clearances at the CIA level, our employees must endure even more severe conditions. Every five years, they are subject to a full security reinvestigation. They have no job tenure. They may not travel abroad, publish articles, marry a non-U.S. citizen, or attend international conferences without advance Agency approval. They can receive no public recognition for their professional achievements but, on the contrary, must suffer in silence innumerable calumnies.

Dominating all other considerations, however, is the single heaviest burden of all: Cover. Cover is our term for concealing the fact that we are in fact employed by Central Intelligence. Nearly 50 percent of CIA employees are under cover. Daily events others take for granted have for us potential cover ramifications. We have to worry about car-pooling, telephone messages, cover salaries, credit investigations, court appearances, and neighborhood gossip. The list is endless. Covered employees given medals for meritorious performance may not retain their awards. Overseas, many of our employees carry two jobs, the cover job and their Agency assignment, thereby making them subject to two bosses, both of whom look for full performance. Stress is inevitable in such a dual life.

Living cover pertains to one's self-image and the need for social inclusion and recognition and breeds more conflicts with a family's growing need for social status, recognition and identity. The spouse must always be on guard even in the most casual of conversations with friends and neighbors. The employee's true profession must be concealed from the children until they are mature enough to handle the knowledge responsibly. Thus, the stress of dual life extends to every member of the family.

Cover affects those employees who themselves may not be under cover. Social interchange outside the work place must be handled with discretion. Even if not under cover in Washington, employees who travel abroad must develop a cover legend. The Agency avoids large, morale-building organizational events popular with similar institutions out of fear of jeopardizing employee cover.

Most will agree that in these tense times our nation's first line of defense is in intelligence. Recognizing this, in the past four years the government has improved immeasurably the intelligence capabilities of this government. It would be extremely unwise to threaten this achievement by severely reducing our ability to recruit and retain the caliber of individuals we have historically attracted. The Director of Central Intelligence must have the authority to move the right people into the right places at the right time. This requires a core of personnel who are prepared to go anywhere in the world as the national interest requires. Ultimately, it also means that we must move people into retirement so that we can prepare the next generation of intelligence officials. The mandatory retirement provision in the Central Intelligence Agency Retirement and Disability System (CIARDS) is an important management tool which has worked well and which should be retained in any new legislation.

We find, for example, that after age 50 nearly 50 percent of our employees are not eligible for full-service medical clearances. Were we to include those who cannot travel owing to family medical constraints, the figure would be even more stark. In addition to the purely clinical health hazards involved in worldwide service, Agency personnel are confronted with psychological stresses which over the long haul extract a health toll just as great. In addition to the subtle factors of cultural translocation and family disruption, there are not infrequently highly traumatic events. Scores of employees have been in foreign prisons, sometimes for years, or otherwise harassed when their

Agency affiliation became known. Employees and their families confront the more diffuse crises associated with civil disorder, terrorism, and other local circumstances which are not even remotely comparable to life in the typical American suburban setting in which our employees otherwise would have remained.

One must also appreciate what the current worldwide epidemic of terrorism means in terms of managing an organization whose employees must daily confront this reality and who, because of their Agency affiliation, are particularly vulnerable. Since 1968, there have been over 8,500 terrorist incidents worldwide, over 3,500 of which were targeted against Americans. Regretably, the end to this scourge is not yet in sight. Indeed, it is one of the Agency's most pressing responsibilities to help negate this menace. To do it we need a young and vigorous work force medically and psychologically able to handle the stress and sufficiently courageous to accept the obvious dangers involved.

Several security considerations unique to our profession buttress further our need for a flow-through personnel system allowing for early retirement. Prolonged service in operational environments increases the risk of identification of our operatives to hostile intelligence, internal security, or terrorist organizations. Anonymity is a critical ingredient for a successful intelligence officer. Personal security inevitably erodes with time and new operatives must constantly be put into the system. To maintain balance in the personnel structure, older, more exposed individuals must be allowed to retire.

Ironically, some of the retirement proposals would cause our older employees, who should leave, to stay, and our younger employees, who should stay, to leave. Our officer corps is recruited generally from the recent college graduate pool, roughly the 20-to-25-year-old age group. While it is to the government's disadvantage to keep these people for 40 years for the reasons previously stated, it is equally disadvantageous from a security standpoint to permit them to leave our service in less than 20 to 30 years without an adequate retirement. Agency employees have access to highly classified information from the beginning of their employment. We have long recognized the inherent security risks to national security of a short-term, transient work force. Given the extraordinary sensitivity of our mission, we must have a career track which retains staff for a full career but promises them the early opportunity to retire with financial security. Therefore, continuation of eligibility for retirement with full benefits at age 50 for employees in CIARDS is essential.

Employment at CIA means work overseas, whether one is qualified for CIARDS or not.

- Only 36 percent of CIA employees currently serving overseas have qualified for CIARDS; the remaining 64 percent are covered under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS). Unlike members of the Foreign Service, all of whom are eligible for early retirement benefits from the moment they begin their careers, CIA employees must earn their way into CIARDS by serving five years overseas. Given our policy of rotating people to and from the field, it takes time for employees to earn

the five-year credit. Obviously some never do, which explains why, in this overseas-oriented organization, only a small percentage of the staff is in CIARDS.

- Forty-two percent of our Civil Service retiree population of the past five years had overseas duty with the Central Intelligence Agency.
- CIA has thousands of employees who have served abroad but have not yet qualified for CIARDS.
- Nearly 50 percent of Agency employees bear the lifelong burden of cover; yet, a majority of those under cover are not qualified for CIARDS. Overseas service is becoming more dangerous for all Americans, but especially for employees of CIA. The mortality figures for our people are grim.
- Since the early 50s, of the nearly 200 Agency employees who have died serving abroad, less than 30 percent were CIARDS-qualified.
- One of the two most senior CIA officers slain in hostile action overseas was the director of a headquarters analytical office.

CIA is a single and indivisible Agency with a single culture and ethic. At present there is an *esprit de corps* among all our employees, an Agency-wide team approach,

a general state of mind that timeliness is critical, accuracy is imperative and absorption with the task at hand takes priority over personal distractions. Advancing years often bring about a lessening of work vigor and enthusiasm. The larger the proportion of older employees, the greater the debilitating effect on the tenor of the Agency. A healthy career organization now exists. Fundamental to this health has been the successful policy which recognizes burnout as a reality and allows our employees to retire early and with dignity.

The special overseas mission of CIA justifies continuation of eligibility for retirement with full benefits at age 50 for employees in CIARDS. This is as it should be; however, the special requirements and mission of CIA involve all of our employees in a number of ways unique in the government. This legislatively mandated special status for CIA affects *all* our people and is the basis for a personnel system different from any other agency—from recruitment to retirement. Any changes in the current retirement systems will have to be very carefully considered to ensure that potential repercussions are fully understood. We are confident that, working in close consultation with our Oversight Committee, we can achieve our mutual goals.

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